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Miss Fidelia's Garden

By Jerome Sprague

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Miss Fidelia had made up her mind that none of her nieces should miss the privileges of girlhood.

"When I was young," she said to her most intimate friend, Mrs. Perkins, "when I was young, Phoebe, you know how things were with me. Father and mother didn't believe that sentiment was necessary, and they made us wear practical, plain things, and entertain our company when the whole family was present, and the result was that Mary and Margaret ran away to get married, and I, not having their courage, have remained single. And now Mary and Margaret are doing just as father and mother did, driving their five pretty daughters to clandestine engagements, and making all sorts of trouble if they look at a young man."

"Well," Mrs. Perkins said, "you know how I used to pity you, Fidelia. It was only when you came over to my house that you ever saw Andrew Stokes, and at last your conscience worried you about that, and you stayed away, and he thought you didn't like him any more and went out west."

There was a pretty blush on Miss Fidelia's cheeks. "Oh, Andrew Stokes," she mused, "he was a nice boy, Phoebe, and if I had it to do over again I'd act differently."

Her calm manner deceived Phoebe. "She's forgotten that she thought her heart was broken. I remember she cried for a whole night in my arms when he went away." But she did not voice her thought, she merely asked, placidly, "What are you going to do about your nieces?"

"I'm going to provide everything that will help them along the road to matrimony," said Miss Fidelia, firmly. "I've been happy enough, Phoebe, but I've missed a lot—and I'm not going to have them following in my footsteps. And since Uncle Jude died and left me the old place I have planned to fix it so that when those girls come to see me there will be everything ready to entertain their young men. I'm going to have hammocks and cozy corners, and a big fireplace where they can pop corn and make candy, and I'm going to have the floor in the dining room polished so that they can dance. And if they don't have a good time it won't be because I don't know how to plan it for them."

Miss Fidelia's sisters argued that the little lady's ideas were ridiculous. Her garden, for example, she called "the garden of love," and there was a fountain in it, with a cupid in marble holding the water-spout.

"Everybody will think you are a sentimental old maid," was the unvarnished statement of sister Mary, when she came over one night to find her own three pretty daughters and Margaret's acting as hostesses to a crowd of laughing young folk.

"I am," said Miss Fidelia, serenely. "I wasn't allowed to have any sweetness and romance in my own youth, and I'm going to see that other people get it."

"I wouldn't let my girls go there," Mary confided afterward to Margaret; "but Uncle Jude left Fidelia all his money, and it won't pay to make her mad. He was always furious over that Andrew Stokes affair; he thought father and mother should have let Fidelia marry him."

"That reminds me," Margaret said. "Andrew Stokes is in town. Rufus saw him at the postoffice." Mary stared. "Well, of all things," she said. Then she leaned forward, confidentially. "We'd better keep him away from Fidelia," she said. "Fidelia ain't fifty, and you don't know what notions she might have about him."

If they had only guessed, the memory of Andrew Stokes burned in Miss Fidelia's heart. She had never forgotten him, never ceased to mourn her lack of courage in refusing to marry him.

It was Phoebe Perkins who told her he was in town. "Andrew Stokes came to see us last night, Fidelia," she said. "He asked after you."

It seemed to Miss Fidelia as if the secret which she had kept so long must be read now in her face. Her heart beat to suffocation. But she managed to say, calmly, "Is he married, Phoebe?"

"No, and he hasn't lost his looks, Fidelia. His hair is gray, but he's as straight and handsome as ever, and he seems prosperous. They say he has made a lot of money."

"What did he say about me?" Miss Fidelia held her breath for the answer, and Phoebe hesitated to give it. "He asked if that pretty little girl who jilted him had ever married. And he said it very bitterly."

"But I didn't jilt him," Miss Fidelia cried. "Why, I—I just didn't give him any answer at all!"

"Well, when we told him you were single, he waited a while and then asked: 'Is she as pretty as ever?'"

"Oh, Phoebe!"

"And I said 'yes,'" Mrs. Perkins asserted stoutly. "Of course you aren't as young, but except that your curls are silver instead of gold, I can't see much difference."

That night Miss Fidelia sat down beside the fountain. "I guess I am too old," she whispered. "I put on this white dress tonight and tied a blue ribbon around my hair, but I don't look the same—and anyhow, I can't expect Andrew to come to my garden of love. He wouldn't understand that I'm brave enough now. I'd fly with him to the ends of the earth."

"Would you, Fidelia?" said some one behind her, and she turned and gasped, "Andrew."

"Let me look at you." He drew her up from the bench. "You're still a little, little timid thing," he said, as she shrank from him. "Phoebe Perkins has been telling me some things, Fidelia. I wonder if she guessed the truth."

"I don't know," Miss Fidelia faltered.

"She told me that you had laid out this garden of love because you had missed romance in your own life, and she told me you cried the night that I left, Fidelia."

He bent over her, and, suddenly, Miss Fidelia, timid Miss Fidelia,



"He Wouldn't Understand That I'm Brave Enough Now."

who had been taught to hide her feelings, broke away suddenly from all bonds.

"There hasn't been a minute in all these years that I haven't thought of you, Andrew," she cried. "And when I made my garden it was always you and myself that I saw in it as we might have been—it was for you I made my garden of love, Andrew."

And after a little while, when rapturously he had renewed the vows of his youth, she leaned over and looked at the cupid in the fountain.

"Look, Andrew," she said, joyously, "he isn't sneering at me now, he's laughing, because at last we're reunited."

TONGUE FROZE TO PIPE.

A peculiar mishap befell little Frank Kuhl, when he went shopping with his mother the other day at Red Bank, N. J. While his mother was making a purchase the youngster found his way into a large refrigerator in the rear of the store. Frost on a pipe there attracted his attention, and trying to relieve his parched tongue, he placed it against the frost-covered pipe. The tongue immediately froze fast and Frank was a prisoner. His mother, missing him, became almost frantic. When, much later, the boy was found, hot cloths were applied to the pipe and his tongue thawed out. He had suffered great pain, and had to receive medical attention.

A MEAN HINT.

"I can hardly keep my countenance," "Yes you can. Nobody else wants it."

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